

# Parks-people conflicts: the case of Gonarezhou National Park and the Chitsa community in south-east Zimbabwe

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**Abstract** National parks have been the centre piece of international conservation strategies in developing countries. The expansion in the network of national parks has enabled the conservation of biodiversity and habitats but the acquisition of vast areas into the park system has often been achieved through the displacement of resident local communities. Displaced people are exposed to a variety of impoverishment risks and this stokes up animosity towards parks. The research reported here seeks to understand the key issues involved in the occupation of a section of Gonarezhou National Park by Headman Chitsa's people. The paper examines how the interplay between the history of displacement and dispossession, demographic pressures, limited economic opportunities, the 'fast track' land reform programme and dynastic politics are fomenting the land conflict between Gonarezhou and Chitsa community. Secondary actors with diverse interests have also come into the fold. Official efforts to resolve the conflict using a top-down approach have yielded little success. This culminated in a shift towards the use of traditional mechanisms of resolving a chieftaincy dispute as a step towards addressing the broader parks-people land conflict. Lessons from the case study are, *inter alia*, that interventions aimed at resolving parks-people conflicts should be alive to local culture, livelihood needs and power dynamics and, to the extent possible, eschew forcible relocations. Finally, we draw attention to the need to address the wider contradiction between policies promoting wildlife conservation and those promoting agriculture. The article is written to share lessons with readers interested in parks-people conflicts.

**Keywords** Chitsa community · Conflict · Conflict resolution mechanisms · Conservation · Displacement · Gonarezhou National Park · Impoverishment risks · Lessons learnt

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## Introduction

The Vth IUCN World Parks Congress of 2003 highlights the centrality of national parks for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Globally, parks now occupy 11.5% of the Earth's land surface compared to 3% in 1962 (IUCN 2005). In Zimbabwe, the Parks and Wildlife Estate cover some 12.7% or nearly 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the country (Taylor 1990). Conservationists argue that the biodiversity in national parks provides a range of goods and services to humanity (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005) and that the displacement of resident communities raises the levels of biodiversity protection (Terborgh 1999; Kramer et al. 1997). In the context of developing economies, advocates of pristine wilderness also argue that parks could become engines of tourism-centred economic growth and contribute to poverty reduction (UNDP 2003; Scherl et al. 2004; Child 2004). Social science critics challenge the naturalist philosophy that separates human society from nature and leads to the eviction of local stewards of habitats, wildlife and related resources (Colchester 2002; Dowie 2005). Critics point out that the displacement of resident local communities exposes them to risks of impoverishment (Cernea 2006). Critics further argue that the relocation of resident communities from national parks heightens conflict and places conservation goals in peril (Pimbert and Pretty 1995). A case in point is the occupation of a northern section of Gonarezhou National Park (hereafter, GNP) by Headman Chitsa's people in Chiredzi District, Zimbabwe (see Fig. 1).

This paper examines the creation of GNP, its past and present impacts on the Chitsa people and the different, contested meanings that conservationists and local people invest in the disputed land. On the one hand, Headman Chitsa and his people are re-asserting claims to ancestral land and a chieftainship that were lost during the colonial period. For them, in the context of rising poverty driven by population growth and limited economic opportunities outside agriculture, traditional land use marked by human settlement, cultivation of crops, keeping of livestock and accessing of water, trees, grasses and other resources remains the only means of ensuring survival and the extension of land area becomes crucial to maintain livelihoods. By attempting to reclaim a lost territory and chieftainship to achieve their ends, Headman Chitsa and his people are setting themselves against not only GNP but also Chief Tshovani whose authority Chitsa is increasingly questioning. On the other hand, GNP asserts rights over the disputed land on the basis of existing legislation which seeks to protect floral and faunal species and 'pristine' wildernesses. The Parks and Wildlife Act (1996, Chapter 20:14) prohibits settlement in parks as well as the subdivision of parks for any other use.

GNP's merger with Kruger and Limpopo National Parks, in respectively South Africa and Mozambique, to form the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park has elevated its significance for wilderness conservation and regional tourism. The GNP has plans to develop an Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ) for Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) in the particular area occupied by Chitsa people (see Fig. 1). The establishment of this IPZ is thus dependent on the resolution of the GNP-Chitsa land dispute (Foggin, *personal communication*). From the GNP's perspective, human settlements in the park fly in the face of the transfrontier park's conservation and development objectives. Clearly, land has become a confrontational fault line in relations between GNP and the Chitsa community.

The term 'community' has spatial, socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions to it (Mombeshora 2002). Spatially and socio-culturally, Chitsa people occupy the northern portion of GNP and the settlement is inhabited by an estimated 740 households and a population of 5,365 people (Mombeshora 2006). The majority of the settlers belong to the Shangaan ethnic group. Politically, the settlers identify themselves as Chitsa's, and not

Chief Tshovani’s, people, that is, people who live in Headman Chitsa’s territory and who are his ‘subjects.’ Chief Tshovani is opposed to the settlement in the park. In contrast, Headman Chitsa is highly regarded by the settlers as the tip of the spear in defending them from possible eviction. Headman Chitsa himself does not stay in the park, his homestead is in neighbouring Ndali communal land (see Fig. 1). Economically, the settlers share a way of living, that is, farming and livestock keeping.

In this paper, the term ‘conflicts’ is used to refer to relationships involving parks, local people and other stakeholders who have or perceive themselves to have, incompatible values, needs, interests and goals (FAO 2007). Parks-people conflicts become manifest when the parties purposefully employ their power in an effort to defeat, neutralize or eliminate each other to protect or further their interests in the interaction (Rycroft 2002). Displacement is a major outcome of parks-people conflicts and it refers to processes in which local people are forcibly removed from their homes; restricted from using land and resources from which they derive livelihoods; lose access to places of religious and cultural value; obliterated symbolically, and sometimes physically, from landscapes, that is, from history, memory and representation and the interference of regulations into people’s lives in ways in which they have little control (Cernea 1997, 2006; Adams and Hutton 2007; Brockington and Igoe 2006). Displacements are often carried out in the name of biodiversity conservation and occasionally ‘development.’ Conservation refers to the protection and wise use of biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems (Pearce 2005) and the term

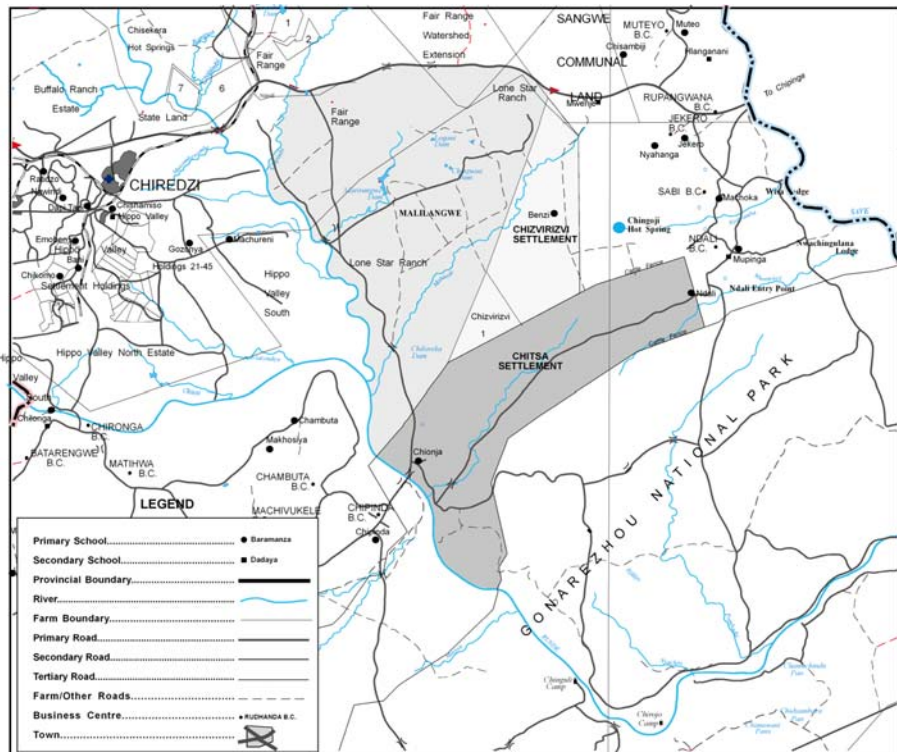


Fig. 1 Location of Chitsa Settlement in North Eastern Chiredzi

‘development’ could be conceptualized as increases in people’s livelihood opportunities and material and aesthetic benefits derived from, among other things, the wise use of biodiversity.

The research, on which this paper is based, was commissioned by Bio-Hub<sup>1</sup> in a bid to understand the factors underlying the GNP-Chitsa conflict and find possible solutions. We place our case study in the context of influential ideas that frame people’s place in nature and parks and present briefly evidence of parks-people conflicts in other African countries. Changing national policies, politics, demographic growth and increasing competition over scarce natural resources have been crucial factors underlying the GNP-Chitsa conflict and local factors fuelling it have pivoted on the chieftainship dispute between Headman Chitsa and Chief Tshovani; their contrasting perceptions of place, identity and power; and their differences over tradition, modernity and alliances. We examine the institutional mechanisms employed to try and find solutions to the conflict and present lessons learnt from this case study that have significance for scholarly thinking and applied research on, as well as interventions in, parks-people conflicts in Zimbabwe and beyond.

### **Parks-people conflicts: a review**

National Parks have been the mainstay of international conservation strategies in developing countries but their establishment and management often entails the displacement of resident populations (Brockington 2002; Colchester 2002; Dowie 2005). Displacement of communities residing in parks is a controversial subject that sharply divides conservationist biologists and social science critics (Adams and Hutton 2007; Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007). Development projects that are justified as beneficial to the public such as hydropower dams and reservoirs often displace local people and this too has proved controversial because the projects are characterized by top-down planning that excludes, or pays lip-service to, local interests (Cernea 1997; de Wet 2000).

In order to place displacements from national parks in perspective, it is useful to look at how parks have been universally envisaged. IUCN (1994) defines national parks as ‘natural areas of land and/or sea, designated to (a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for this and future generations, (b) *exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area* and (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible (see Scherl et al. 2004; *our emphasis*). In view of this definition, the residence of people in parks is a potent source of conflicts. This is made all the more disquieting by the fact that many national parks around the world contain people. In South America, 85% of national parks have people living inside them (Amend and Amend 1995 cited in Brockington and Igoe 2006). Kothari (2004) tells us that nearly four million people live in protected areas in India and they face the risk of conservation-based evictions. In the Central African Region, about 70% of national parks are inhabited and/or used by local people for livelihood purposes (Cernea 2006 cited in Brockington and Igoe 2006). In Southern Africa, Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana and GNP have people living inside them (Vicente et al. 2003; Taylor 2007; Mombeshora 2005).

<sup>1</sup> Bio-Hub is a consortium of CIRAD, World Wildlife Fund for Nature, IUCN and IGF.

The prescription of priorities for government actions on human settlements in parks has been heavily influenced by the ideas of conservation biologists who advocate ‘people out’ or ‘fortress’ conservation (Pimbert and Pretty 1995; Adams and Hulme 2001; Brockington 2002). Ideas about parks, people and development have been formed, shared and applied in ways that are inherently political (Escobar 1999) even if they are framed in the ostensibly ‘neutral’ language of habitats, biodiversity, ecosystems and conservation. Whilst natural sciences have devoted broader, systematic research efforts to understanding ecosystems and biodiversity, social sciences have engaged with the politics surrounding the application of these ideas and the impacts of conservation projects on the welfare of people (Adams and Hutton 2007). In other words, different ‘epistemic communities’ have emerged which may or may not agree on the best means to be used to achieve biodiversity conservation and development (Haas 1992; Hulme and Murphree 2001; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003a). ‘Epistemic communities’ are networks of individuals sharing core beliefs about the subject area; they share similar basic assumptions about cause and effect relationships (Keeley and Scoones 1999) and if presented with similar scenarios, different members of the community reach broadly similar policy conclusions.

Leach and Mearns (1996) point out that the establishment of protected areas, including parks, reflects a conceptual division between pristine nature and human society that has deep roots in Western scientific thought and practice. The belief that wilderness should be separated and preserved from people is, as Brockington and Homewood (1996) point out, sacrosanct in Western thinking and is revered by generations of conservationists and western-trained conservationists in developing countries. Another related belief is that there is an inverse relationship between human actions and the well-being of the environment (Pimbert and Pretty 1995) and that the loss of wildlife, forests and habitats requires strong state (and non-state actors’) interventions to avert further deterioration. These ideas lie deeper in culture and consciousness (Brockington and Homewood 1996) and they are advocated with gusto and grit. For instance, Terborgh (1999) and Kramer et al. (1997) argue that biodiversity is being lost at an unprecedented scale and therefore humanity has a moral obligation to act now to stop the loss. In this regard national parks are regarded as a key instrument and human displacements an ‘inevitable’ outcome. A related innovation by conservation biologists is the creation of biological corridors across political boundaries in order to re-establish connectivity between biological regions, restore animal migrations and the flow of genetic material, improve wildlife’s access to natural resources and to repopulate depleted species (Griffin et al. 1999). This has been a powerful reason behind the creation of game corridors and transfrontier parks (Van der Linde et al. 2001).

These ideas have had an enduring impact in many countries where ‘pristine’ nature or wilderness in parks has had to be actively created, separated from the perceived despoiling activities of people (Adams and Hulme 2001), ring-fenced with a battery of state laws defining access and then admired and enjoyed by elites and tourists. The genealogy of this practice can be retraced to the USA. The world’s first national park Yellowstone was established, during the 19th century, after bitter wars that saw the eviction of native Indians from their land in the state of Wyoming (Colchester 2002). John Muir, a forefather of the American conservation movement, argued that ‘wilderness’ should be cleared of all inhabitants and set aside to satisfy urbane people’s tastes for recreation and spiritual renewal (Dowie 2005). This sentiment became national policy with the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act which defined wilderness as a place ‘where man himself is a visitor who does not remain’ (Oilwatch and World Rainforest Movement 2004). However, the profit motive was never far away. The first park at Yellowstone also attracted visitors to scenic

sights and set the stage for today's 'ecotourism' (Colchester 2002). As it had begun, so it has gone on.

The export of the Yellowstone Park model to the developing world has resulted in similar experiences of displacement and exclusion of local people while at the same time attracting tourists. Brockington and Igoe (2006) point out that, globally, the vast majority, that is, 69% of evictions reported for all protected areas occurred in national parks. Most have been concentrated in Africa, South and South-East Asia and North America. We give here some indicative examples of displacements from East, Central and Southern Africa.

In East Africa, many game reserves and national parks were created by the eviction of people (Adams and Hutton 2007). Neumann (1998) points out that the wilderness of Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania was imposed through the displacement of 40,000 people during the colonial period. As recently as 1988, more than 8,000 Maasai and Parakuyo pastoralists and their cattle numbering over 100,000 were evicted from Mkomazi Game Reserve by the Tanzanian government because conservationists reported with alarm that pastoralists were endangering wildlife species, habitats and tourism in the area (Brockington 2002). In Uganda, when Lake Mburo National Park was created in 1982, 4,500 families were evicted from the area without compensation (Emerton 1999) and park authorities are presently embroiled in conflict with Bahima pastoralists (Infield 2003) over the grazing of cattle in the park. The creation of a game corridor linking Queen Elizabeth National Park to Kibale Forest Reserve in Uganda resulted in the eviction, without warning, of 30,000 people (Colchester 2002). Whilst evictees lamented the loss of their land, homes, livestock and household property, the European Commission's chief technical advisor to the game corridor project said *'this successful operation has opened up the possibility of the frustrated elephant population of Kibale once more being free to migrate between the Queen Elizabeth Park and the forest'* (Feeney 1993 cited in Colchester 2002).

In Central Africa, the creation of national parks in the heart of the rainforest has involved displacements of 120,000 people since 1990 and a further 170,000 people face the risk of being displaced as a result of planned increases in the sizes of protected areas which were adopted by governments on the basis of a proposal by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (Schmidt-Soltau 2005). An additional 250,000 people will become involuntary 'hosts' to the displaced.

In Southern Africa, especially in colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe, the intensity of competition between white settler and African communities over natural resources and the increasingly powerful hold of settlers over the instruments of state power ensured that the regulation of the environment became a deeply politicized issue (Beinart 1989). The approach to conservation was essentially top-down and this applied to many spheres including wildlife conservation (Anderson and Grove 1987). Carruthers (1995) points out that the creation of Kruger National Park in South Africa in the mid-1920s helped to forge a common conservationist identity among culturally different English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites, but in their search for common ground whites excluded blacks and prohibited them from using wildlife. Stereotypically regarded as 'poachers', blacks were hounded and displaced from the park (Carruthers 1995) and they in turn came to view the park as a colonial invention which elevated wildlife above humanity and which served as an instrument of dispossession. In colonial Zimbabwe the 224,000 acres of Matopos Hills, which became Matopos National Park in 1926, initially combined use by both blacks and whites but increasingly whites came to believe that the hills in which Cecil John Rhodes (founder of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe) was buried must be preserved (Ranger 1999). The hills were important for wildlife, white pilgrimage to Rhodes' grave, and they were also sources of rivers which fed white livestock ranches. To the Ndebele, the hills had religious

significance and they offered not a wild but domesticated environment in which their livestock grazed and watered and where they could achieve good crops on vleis and sponges (Ranger 1989). In the 1940s, colonial agricultural science experts, like Charles Murray, began to define the ‘correct’ carrying capacity of the hills in relation to African families and livestock and to see the inhabitants of the park as posing a serious threat to the soil and water resources in the hills (Ranger 1989, 1999). During 1952, and then again in 1962, families were evicted and a missionary school, church and houses destroyed. Thenceforth, the park was said to stamp itself indelibly on the minds of tourist visitors as ‘one of the wildest, loveliest and often strangest natural splendours in Zimbabwe’ because of its ‘88 different species of animals, 100 species of grass, the highest number of birds of prey in the world and its innumerable habitats, micro-habitats and niches’ (Ranger 1989).

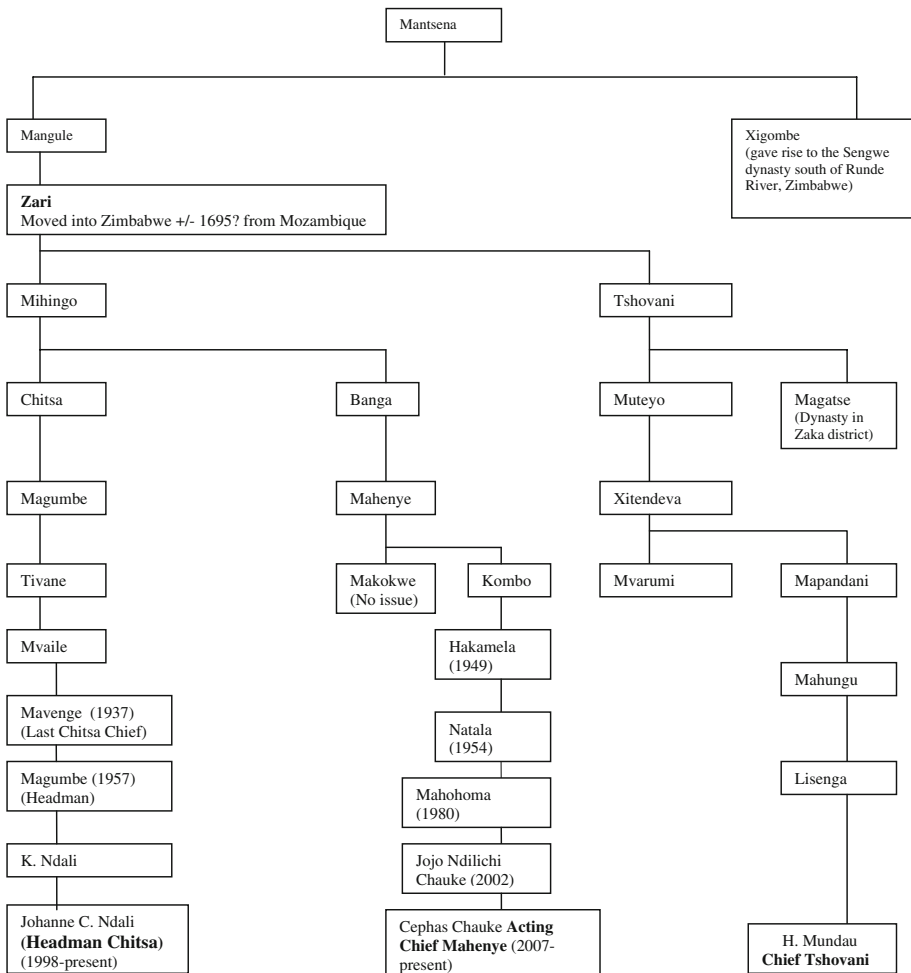
In a similar vein, development-induced displacements in colonial Zimbabwe largely occurred as a result of the expropriation of land for white-owned commercial farms (McIvor 1994) and the construction of lakes like Kariba. Lake Kariba displaced 23,000 Zimbabwean, and 34,000 Zambian, Tonga people, respectively (de Wet 2000). Development and conservation induced displacements are often imposed by states with the promise of delivering significant public benefits such as hydroelectricity, irrigation and tourism-led economic growth but in practice they do place immense costs on displaced persons.

Conservation biologists, on the one hand, see the sequestration of land from communities resident in national parks as enhancing the levels of nature protection (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006). Biologists assess the issue of human displacements in terms of the viability of endangered species, habitats and ecosystems and these are said to recover well in zones free of human habitation (cf. Brockington 2002). Social scientists, on the other hand, argue that displacements are the most ruinous outcomes of the conflicts between parks and people (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003a; Adams and Hutton 2007). Cernea (1997) identifies eight major impoverishment risks that have distinct relevance to conservation-induced displacements. These include landlessness, joblessness (loss of means of subsistence), homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to common property resources and social disarticulation. These are the portentous risks that Chitsa settlers in GNP face.

### Origins of the GNP-Chitsa conflict

Consistent with the Yellowstone Park model, the GNP was carved out of land traditionally belonging to the Shangaan. The Shangaan people in Chiredzi and Chipinge districts are a segment of the larger group of Shangaan speaking people who in pre-colonial times occupied the south-east lowlands of Zimbabwe, the north-east lowlands of what is now Limpopo Province in South Africa and much of what is now Gaza and Inhambane Provinces of Mozambique (Murphree 2001). The lowveld area which the Shangaan occupied was, and still is, prone to recurrent droughts. In consequence, they practiced agriculture along the main rivers and streams and also subsisted on hunting, fishing, trading and gathering wild foods. Cattle were kept on a limited scale because of the presence of tsetse fly. Politically, Shangaan people were clustered around Chiefs and Headmen. In our study area of Sangwe Communal land (see Fig. 1) Chief Tshovani and Headman Chitsa trace their descent from a common ancestor known as Zari (see Fig. 2) who moved from Mozambique to Zimbabwe during the pre-colonial period (Jacques 1938; Bannerman

1980). Zari had a number of sons who included, in order of seniority, Mihingo from whom the Chitsa dynasty is descended and Tshovani the founder of the Tshovani dynasty. Mihingo’s sons were Chitsa and Banga. The latter founded the Mahenye dynasty, in Chipinge district, from which Chief Mahenye traces descent. The other Shangaan Chief in the district of Chiredzi is Sengwe who is descended from Mantsena the grandfather of Zari (see Fig. 2). Consistent with the dynastic genealogy and Shangaan traditions, Headman Chitsa argues that Mihingo was senior to Tshovani and that he himself should also be the senior partner in the current royal hierarchy. He considers his current position of Headman to be a travesty of justice and an anomaly that should be corrected. Whilst acknowledging common descent, Chief Tshovani argues that the current status hierarchy should be maintained. These arguments about royal status need be placed within the broader context of colonial rule and the changes it brought about.



**Fig. 2** Genealogy of the Chitsa, Mahenye, Tshovani and Sengwe Dynasties. Source: Jacques (1938); Bannerman (1980); Key informant interviews (October, 2007)



Colonialism brought displacement and concentration of settlements in native reserves as land was expropriated by the state for agro-pastoral and conservation purposes (Wolmer et al. 2004). As GNP was being created out of Shangaan territory, Chitsa people were caught up in these changes. Between 1890 and 1933, the area in which Chitsa people lived at the confluence of Save and Runde Rivers was part of a controlled hunting area which was designated for, among other things, selective game elimination to control tsetse flies (Taylor 1990). In 1934 Gonarezhou Game Reserve was proclaimed by ministerial decree amidst opposition by white cattle farmers who feared that it would help the spread of tsetse flies and threaten the cattle industry. The proclamation of Gonarezhou led to the displacement of over 1,500 families and their relocation in Matibi 2 Native Reserve (Murobedzi 2003). During the 1940s, Gonarezhou Game Reserve was de-proclaimed to enable a tsetse control programme to be implemented along the Save and Runde Rivers. The Chitsa community settlement was not part of the Game Reserve but by 1956 the settlement was included in Gonarezhou. As the boundaries of the Game Reserve were redrawn, so were chieftaincies. Chieftaincies were broken up and their members scattered (Lan 1985) and in other places large numbers of royal houses that tried to resist were abolished altogether. Chief Chitsa who had tried to resist the inclusion of his territory into Gonarezhou Game Reserve was demoted to a mere headman and placed under the Chieftainship of Tshovani. Tshovani, who was seen as loyal, was rewarded and his chieftdom now included more people. In 1957 Chitsa's people were evicted from the confluence of Runde and Save Rivers and they resettled near Sangwe communal land in an area they called the Seven Jack. The Chitsa dynasty and its subjects strongly resented the relocation and demotion.

A game fence was erected along Chivonja hills (see Fig. 1) and the fence separated the Seven Jack area of the Chitsa community from Gonarezhou Game Reserve. This is the park boundary that Headman Chitsa recognizes. He disputes the veterinary cattle fence that was put up between the Chitsa community and Sangwe communal land during the 1970s which GNP now regards as the official boundary (see Fig. 1). In 1962 once again the Chitsa people were displaced from the Seven Jack area to make way for another tsetse control operation. This time they were settled in Sangwe communal land in the Ndali area on the understanding that they would return after the tsetse control operation was completed. Meanwhile, the colonial government drilled boreholes in the area but the Seven Jack area was leased to Lone Star Ranch as a cattle grazing area (Wolmer 2003). A veterinary cattle fence with iron poles was erected in 1974 around the disputed land (see Fig. 1). As the war of liberation intensified in the 1970s, the population in Sangwe communal land, as elsewhere, was moved into protected villages popularly known as 'keeps'. During 1975, Gonarezhou Game Reserve was formally gazetted as a national park and the Seven Jack area, which Chitsa people are claiming as theirs, became part of the park. The veterinary cattle fence effectively became the official boundary of the park (see Fig. 1).

In terms of rural administration, indirect rule incorporated traditional leaders into a governance structure that was designed to provide the colonial state with a low cost administrative system that collected taxes, maintained order and mobilized labour (Lan 1985; Economic Commission for Africa 2007). In Zimbabwe as in South Africa and other colonies, chiefs and headmen came to rely more on their alliance with the colonial government (Ranger 1999; Maloka 1996) than on their communities.

After Independence in 1980, the new administration tried unsuccessfully to strip chiefs of most of their authority. The new administration embraced popular participation and in its rhetoric it portrayed chieftaincies as undemocratic. The state sought to transform populations living in chieftdoms into 'citizens' (Mamdani 1996) who could actively

participate in electing their leaders. Despite these efforts, chieftaincies and headmanships like those of Tshovani and Chitsa continued to operate as custodians of customary law by resolving conflicts and serving as guardians and symbols of cultural values and ritual practices. The Zimbabwe government made an about turn and came to praise the role of chiefs in rural areas not least because of their role as ‘vote brokers’ for the ruling party. Chiefs were rewarded with vehicles, tractors and farming implements, installation of electricity in their homes and higher salaries. As in the colonial era, chiefs are aligning themselves with the powers that offer the best chances for safeguarding their positions and advancing their material interests (Economic Commission for Africa 2007). For headmen with claims to lost chieftaincies, such ostentatious expenditures on chiefs provide little comfort to them; they feel left out. Headman Chitsa has used the invasion of Gonarezhou to escalate his claim to a lost chieftainship and the lost status and privileges.

A combination of factors led to the reoccupation of the northern tip of GNP during 2000. In the early 1980s, the population of Sangwe was 64 persons per km<sup>2</sup> Bannerman (1980) compared to the 1992 provincial average of 21.61 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (Central Statistical Office 1992). Population growth increased pressures on the natural resource base leading to compressed rotational cycles. The parcelling out of land to married sons contributed to the fragmentation of family landholdings. These conditions, together with the playing up by the ruling party and government of the imagery of colonial land dispossession, of landlessness, of longing for ‘lost lands’ to be restored (Lan 1985) provided a powerful political dynamic driving the redistribution of land from commercial farms and state land, notably GNP. Locally, the alliance of Headman Chitsa with veterans of the 1970s war who spearheaded park and farm invasions; a local councillor, a sympathetic Provincial Governor who sought to strengthen his power base and the general chaotic atmosphere helped Headman Chitsa to stake his land claim. The invasion came to be ‘formalized’ when agricultural extension land use planners pegged the area during 2001 as part of the ‘fast-track’ land reform programme (Chaumba et al. 2003). Ten new villages were laid out; each village had arable plots and the whole settlement had communal grazing. With the approval of the Provincial Governor, the district administration issued Chitsa settlers with official permits to reside, cultivate and keep livestock (Wolmer 2003). All this took place without the official knowledge and consent of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism under which GNP falls.

To compound the matter further, during 2002, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique signed the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Treaty which amalgamated GNP, Kruger National Park (KNP) and Limpopo National Park (LNP). The Transfrontier Park is characterized by marked contrasts in its relations with local communities. In South Africa, the displaced Makuleke community successfully reclaimed the land they lost to KNP in 1969 and now derive some benefits. However, technical planning enabled KNP to lock the reclaimed land in a 50-year joint management agreement which specifies that it can only be used for conservation purposes (Steenkamp and Uhr 2000). In Mozambique, the LNP includes land belonging to ten village communities who are to be ‘voluntarily’ resettled outside the park over a period of 5–7 years (Vicente et al. 2003). The LNP’s business plan for 2004–2006, prepared by Vicente et al. (2003), emphasizes that the resettlement of people outside the park is vitally important to its success and sustainable protection. Wilderness conservation interests are taking precedence over local people’s rights to land, resources and livelihoods (Mombeshora 2005). In Zimbabwe, Chitsa people face the same risk of being displaced by the park. In order to comprehend more fully how the GNP-Chitsa conflict is playing itself out, what it means to the actors involved (cf. West et al.

2006) and how it might be resolved, it is necessary to look in more detail at local factors fomenting it.

### Local factors behind the GNP-Chitsa conflict

At the very heart of the GNP-Chitsa conflict is the power struggle between Headman Chitsa and Chief Tshovani. The struggle for seniority between the two traditional leaders (and their followers) is being articulated in the idiom of royal genealogical hierarchies and related rights. The past is invoked in the present in order to try and reconfigure contemporary power relations. These struggles have crystallized around the chieftainship; differential perceptions of place, identity and power; and conflicts over tradition, modernity and alliances. We will take these up *seriatim*.

#### Contested chieftaincy

Headman Chitsa alleges that the Tshovani people working in cahoots with colonial officials orchestrated the disappearance of ‘his’ crown. Official records corroborate the loss of the chieftainship. A letter from the District Commissioner reads in part as follows:

*‘According to our old books here, Chisa Chieftainship was in existence from 1906 to sometime between 1945 and 1960 when most Chieftainships were either downgraded or completely abolished. So in the case of Chisa, he had a big crown which was then downgraded’* (National Archives Ref: CHK/14 Folio 10).

The idea of restoring Chitsa’s chieftaincy has driven a wedge between him and Chief Tshovani. In the power play that is unfolding, GNP has become a symbolic battleground. Whilst acknowledging that they are descended from a common ancestor, Chief Tshovani argues that this is several generations removed (see Fig. 2) and in his view, Chitsa has over time become ‘a stranger.’ Chief Tshovani explained that the Chitsa lineage does not inherit the Tshovani chieftainship and vice versa (see Fig. 2). Headman Chitsa does not attend Tshovani’s traditional rituals and Tshovani reciprocates in kind. Whereas Chief Tshovani is the officially recognized traditional head of the area, Headman Chitsa regards this seniority as a category error that should be corrected. Chief Tshovani strongly opposes such moves and he sees the removal of settlers in GNP as crucial to weakening Chitsa’s attempts to have a separate chiefdom.

The royal genealogies are interpreted differently resulting in contrasting notions of legitimacy. In discussing institutions that are relevant to their livelihoods in a focus group discussion, the settlers in GNP ranked Headman Chitsa highly. Chief Tshovani was ranked as the least important institution because he was said to have never visited the settlers. As a result he was seen as a person who is out of touch and not helping them to resist possible displacement from the park.

#### Displacement and differential perceptions of place, identity and power

Chief Tshovani and Headman Chitsa have, at various points in their history experienced displacement and yet they hold different perceptions about its impact on their sense of place, identity and power. Displacement was a product of forced removal and land expropriation, labour migration, war and resettlement.

Both share important memories about racialized land dispossession during the colonial period. Like other communities, Chitsa people were without any compensation forcefully scattered between different places. In order to pay taxes, most men were drawn into labour migration in and outside the country. In spite of this displacement, most people still longed to return to their villages of origin, places they regarded as ‘home.’ As we noted, during the 1970s liberation war, Chitsa and Tshovani’s peoples were moved to protected villages as the colonial administration strove to cut popular support for guerrillas active in rural areas. The post-colonial government also moved Chief Tshovani and his people from Muteyo near Save River to make way for the establishment of the ARDA Tshovani Irrigation Scheme and resettled them in the current Chizvirizvi Resettlement Area (see Fig. 1). Disruption and relocation have therefore become a part of the run of life for most people in the area; yet these traditional leaders hold different perceptions about its significance.

Commenting on official proposals to move Chitsa people out of GNP, Chief Tshovani cited his experience of displacement and pointed out that this is socio-economically disruptive but it is not without precedent. In contrast, Headman Chitsa sees the relocation of his people as placing him in a qualitatively different situation and predicament. For him and his people, the occupation of the park was motivated by a strong desire for a return to freedom and control associated with the idea of ‘home’ once again. This conception of ‘home’ is vital to Chitsa’s claim to a separate chieftom. From his perspective, the disputed land is critical to the creation of a space where his people can share a sense of belonging, identity and power (Van Donge 2001). Claims to a separate chieftaincy are, for Chitsa, about healing wounds of displacement and dispossession and restoring his (and his people’s) own dignity, sense of place and relative autonomy.

#### Conflicts over ‘traditionalizing modernity’ and ‘modernizing tradition’

Headman Chitsa and ritual leaders in the new settlement are trying to dominate the construction of socio-cultural identity and symbolic meanings. This is a strategy that distances and marks them off as people who are ‘separate’ from Chief Tshovani and his people. Local culture has become what Jackson (1992) aptly referred to as a significant domain of politics. It is an arena where meanings are negotiated and relations of dominance and subordination defined and contested. The main arguments are, for purposes of analysis, summarized here as being about ‘traditionalizing modernity’ and ‘modernizing tradition.’

In interview and at public meetings, Headman Chitsa repeatedly pointed out that he would oppose eviction from the park because, among other things, he has three spirit mediums settled there. The royal ancestors of the Chitsa lineage were said to be central to rainmaking rituals performed by the spirit mediums. In consequence, he would need to be near his sacred ritual sites located in hills in the new settlement. In addition, his people there practice secret initiation rituals. It is at these rituals that boys and girls are taught separately about the essence of local culture and traditions.

Headman Chitsa’s need to be near his spirit mediums and ritual sites is also about the maintenance and representation of his people’s cultural identity and sense of autonomy. If his people were to be resettled in other places, they would not be able to appease their ancestors and more importantly they would not be able to perform rites of passage. In reality, Headman Chitsa’s arguments about ancestral and initiation rituals are about traditionalizing the modern idea of land reform and actualizing his people’s rights to practice their culture.

At another level, Headman Chitsa is at odds with Chief Tshovani over the modernization of tradition. There are sharp inequalities between them arising from their differential appropriation of the material symbols of modernity. As pointed out, Chief Tshovani has received various material rewards from government. Recently government installed electricity at his home. Headman Chitsa is sharply aware of these status differentials and is using his growing influence to try and scale the royal hierarchy.

### Conflicts over alliances

Chitsa people's contestations over land and natural resources in the new settlement are influenced by the cultural politics of place, and what it means to achieve change whilst connecting with the past (Peters 2002). The dispute between Headman Chitsa and Chief Tshovani is producing alliances of power that impact the GNP-Chitsa conflict. Within his territory, Headman Chitsa has established strategic alliances with actors who support the new settlement. Headman Chitsa aligns himself to a former Councillor and an influential war veteran who together spearheaded the occupation of the park. In public discussions, these leaders openly professed their allegiance to Headman Chitsa and not Chief Tshovani even in the latter's presence at meetings.

Headman Chitsa's claims to a specific place and power do not seek to defend the local against all outside influences but rather to shape relations that link him and his subjects to strategic external sites and actors. Headman Chitsa has networked with some key actors in agriculture and lands offices whilst avoiding those opposed to his people's settlement in the park. For him, this has opened up the state as a theatre in which agriculture and conservation actors espouse different policy discourses (Moore 1998) and implement contradictory programmes.

To recap, contextual and local factors have, over time, fuelled the GNP-Chitsa land conflict. The next section looks at institutional mechanisms that have been employed to find solutions to the conflict.

### Conflict resolution mechanisms and processes

Initial efforts to resolve the conflict essentialized the state's right of eminent domain but this principle typically overlooks the impoverishment risks of conservation-induced displacements (Cernea 1997; Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007). These shortcomings have given rise to a bottom-up approach to conflict resolution that attends to local cultural traditions, power dynamics and social justice. In 2003, the Parks Authority requested IUCN to assist in resolving the conflict and SAFIRE (2004), an environmental NGO, looked at a number of options for dealing with Chitsa settlers in GNP.

Officially recognizing the Chitsa community's historical land claim and amending the Parks and Wildlife Act so that the boundaries of GNP exclude the settlement

Headman Chitsa and his people in the park prefer this option. The Parks Authority is concerned that implementing this option could set a precedent and trigger countrywide land claims on protected areas that displaced people (cf. Ranger 1999). Legitimizing Chitsa's land claim would also erode Chief Tshovani's stranglehold on traditional authority and rile Chizvirizvi people who previously shared a boundary with the park. However, this option averts the many impoverishment risks that forced relocation entails.

## Returning the settlers to their original homes and negotiating co-management arrangements over the contested area of the park

This option is broadly similar to the KNP-Makuleke contractual arrangement in South Africa (Steenkamp and Uhr 2000). However, it differs from the Makuleke case in that it would repeat the displacement that took place during the colonial period. Under a joint management option, the benefits from the contested land area could be shared between the Parks Authority and Chitsa community. Consistent with its position on option 1, the Parks Authority is not in favour of any subtraction of its estate. For Chief Tshovani, this option whittles his influence. Chitsa people in GNP are opposed to returning to their original homes. They fear that relocating will bring greater socio-economic hardships.

## Moving Chitsa people outside the park and providing them with irrigation facilities

The Parks Authority prefers this option. Its implementation requires private and public sector investment in irrigation development. Consistent with their need to reclaim ancestral land, Chitsa settlers oppose their removal from the park. The issuance of permits to the settlers by government has complicated matters for the Parks Authority. Moreover, the use of force against the settlers could intensify the conflict. Towards the end of 2005, the Parks Authority made a formal request to Bio-Hub to help find a solution that is satisfactory to both the Authority and Chitsa settlers.

## Creating a platform for conflict management

Bio-Hub partners met in November 2005 to discuss and arrive at a mutual understanding of the Chitsa-GNP dispute.<sup>2</sup> Bio-Hub partners agreed that they would support a negotiated rather than a coerced settlement. The meeting further noted that contestations in traditional leadership and contradictory conservation and agriculture policies made the GNP-Chitsa issue complex. In addition, GNP was anxious to fulfil regional commitments under the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. Bio-Hub's mediation would use a participatory process approach based on principles of multi-stakeholder inclusion, free, prior informed consent, and transparency (cf. Schmidt-Soltau 2007; de Wet 2000).

## The Chitsa task force

The first multi-stakeholder meeting was held in Harare in February 2006. It brought together representatives from the Parks Authority, Bio-Hub, the provincial and district administration, and the provincial lands office. Although invited, Chitsa community representatives did not attend the meeting citing 'logistical' challenges. This reason led to the holding of all subsequent meetings in Chiredzi town and GNP close to Chitsa community representatives. A key outcome of the meeting was the setting up of a *Chitsa Task Force* whose mandate was to carry out community consultations, develop a work plan with milestones, develop a budget, mobilize resources, implement the work plan and provide progress updates to stakeholders.

<sup>2</sup> The authors participated in these discussions.

The Task Force's work plan was in place by March 2006. The work plan sought to resolve the GNP-Chitsa conflict by providing a negotiated 'soft-landing' of the Chitsa community outside the park by 31 August 2006. Some of its specific objectives were to:

- Understand the historical background to the dispute,
- Verify boundaries in the contested area,
- Understand local livelihoods and assess needs,
- Identify alternative livelihood options for the settlers outside the park,
- Facilitate a public-private-community business partnership,
- Attract donor funding for the partnership agreement and implement it.

A budget for the work plan was drawn. The work plan evoked varying meanings to different stakeholders.

### **Multiple stakeholders and conflicting interests**

The Chitsa Task Force brought together the Provincial Administrator who chaired its meetings, Parks Authority officials, Chiredzi district administrator; provincial and district lands officials; a representative of private wildlife conservancies; Chief Tshovani; Headman Chitsa and Chitsa community representatives; a local councillor; the Chief Executive Officer of Chiredzi District and researchers. It became evident at Task Force meetings held between June and July 2006 that key stakeholders had different stakes in the GNP-Chitsa conflict and its perceived outcomes. Differences revolved around the following issues:

- Disagreements over a directive to move Chitsa people out of the park;
- Dispute over the boundary defined in the Parks and Wildlife Act of 1975;
- (Un)suitability of relocation sites;
- Dislocation of livelihoods.

#### **Contested directive**

At public meetings convened by the Task Force in GNP, disagreements emerged over the authenticity of a government directive to relocate Chitsa people. Chitsa community leaders expressed bafflement on hearing that the same government that allocated plots in the park and issued them with permits now wanted to move them from their ancestral land. They wanted to know precisely who gave the directive to evict them. If possible they wanted to see a written copy of the letter authorizing the eviction. They suspected that the idea of displacing them could have been crafted at provincial level and not from Harare.

The provincial administrator traced the directive back to the Cabinet. He explained that civil servants implement Cabinet decisions and that was what the provincial administration was doing. The provincial administrator was aware that Chitsa people were allocated permits but government had decided to remove them from the park. Chitsa people expressed their doubts over the authenticity of the directive. They also disputed GNP's boundary.

#### **Dispute over a boundary defined by Parks and Wildlife Act of 1975**

Headman Chitsa's argument is that the park boundary defined in the 1975 Act was imposed on the community and that they do not recognize it. They recognize the boundary that

existed in 1957 that excluded their current settlement. Whilst acknowledging the socio-political issues surrounding the demarcation of the boundary during the colonial era, Parks Authority officials insisted that the authority's mandate is to enforce existing laws and maintain the parks estate. These laws do not allow communities to settle in parks.

#### (Un)suitability of relocation sites

Lands officials in the Task Force were requested by the provincial administrator to identify alternative land on which Chitsa people could be resettled. This proved to be more complex than it first appeared. Lands officials recommended resettlement of Chitsa people in disparate places like Masangula, Nyangambe, Ngwame ranch and Mkwasine. The mention of these sites sparked intense controversy. To make matters worse, the local press reported that Chitsa people had agreed to relocate outside the park.

Headman Chitsa responded to these reports by leading a delegation of community representatives to have audience with the Provincial Governor of Masvingo. Headman Chitsa reportedly informed the Governor that he and his people had not agreed to move out of the park. Furthermore, that the relocation of his people in far away places such as Masangula and Ngwame would break up his power base. The Chitsa delegation suggested to the Governor that land could be found in Malilangwe Conservancy (see Fig. 1). The Provincial Governor reportedly indicated that the intention of government was not to dismantle his headmanship or the neighbouring conservancy. Lands officials were said to have indicated that land could be found in neighbouring Chizvirizvi. The Governor tasked lands officials to re-plan Chizvirizvi and to continue looking for additional land elsewhere.

Between meetings of the Task Force, lands officials visited Chizvirizvi to carry out a situation analysis of available land. They also estimated the number of households from the park that could be relocated in alternative settlements. They provided the land sizes and number of people to be resettled (see Table 1).

Without paying any regard to the negative impacts of the intended resettlement of Chitsa people on 'host' communities (cf. Cernea 1997, 2006), lands officials suggested that people from the park could be resettled in Chizvirizvi, Nyangambe, Ngwame and Mkwasine sugar estate. They proposed to reduce the hectareage of self-contained plots in

**Table 1** Possible relocation sites for Chitsa people

Scheme	Total hectares	Proposed re-planning model	Current no. of households	Expected hectares per household	Total no. of households to be absorbed from Parks land	Overall total number of households per scheme
Chizvirizvi	24,000	Villagized or self contained	300 (+200 from natural increase)	30	300	800
Nyangambe	9,000	Villagized	Vacant	30	300	300
Ngwame	300	Villagized irrigation	30	2	120	150
Mkwasine	17,000	A <sup>1</sup> self-contained	231	50	115	346
Total	50,300		761		835	1,596

Source Task Force Meeting, 10 July 2006



Chizvirizvi from 70 to 80 ha to 30 ha per household. The re-planned scheme would accommodate 300 settlers from the park. The proposal generated opposition from Chief Tshovani. Chitsa wanted his people to be resettled in Chizvirizvi as a group and not to be scattered. Chief Tshovani questioned this arguing that this was his territory and that he could not understand why the people from the park wanted to have a separate zone for themselves in Chizvirizvi. Chizvirizvi community leaders, including Chief Tshovani, subsequently wrote a petition to the Provincial Governor protesting the proposed reduction in the sizes of their plots. They argued that they have children who will need land in the future and that there was no land to spare. As a result of this, the Task Force changed tack and took off Chizvirizvi as an option for resettlement.

Chitsa community leaders pointed out that Nyangambe has barren land and that is why it is vacant. Although Parks officials suggested that it could be used for cattle ranching, Chitsa community representatives were not convinced. Nyangambe was therefore seen as unsuitable for resettlement.

The Task Force considered Ngwame ranch. Lands officials indicated that if the area were to be re-planned as a villagized irrigation scheme it could accommodate 120 settlers from the park. Chitsa representatives argued that former farm workers inhabit the ranch and that it has no under-utilized land. Resettling Chitsa people there would create conflicts. Headman Chitsa continued to remind the Task Force that moving his people to distant places would reduce his political influence. In his view, this would make him a 'headman of wildlife' and not people. Mkwasi sugar estate was regarded as inappropriate because the management there is short of land to plant sugar cane.

Community representatives in the Task Force further argued that relocation outside the park was not their preferred option. However, if government proceeded to execute this using its powers of eminent domain, it should settle them near the park so that they could benefit from projects established under the framework of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

### Dislocation of livelihoods

Significantly, Chitsa community representatives viewed the proposed relocation of their people outside the park as a disturbing threat to their livelihoods. Relocation would wrest from them important common pool resources such as woodlands, underground water, livestock pastures, agricultural land and sacred ritual sites (cf. Cernea 1997; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003b). Securing continuous access to these resources became one of their greatest concerns. As noted, there were other reasons including reclaiming the lost chieftainship and maintaining a distinct cultural identity as Chitsa's people.

The dominant objective of the Task Force to remove settlers from the park by 31 August 2006 became unrealistic in the face of dogged resistance by Headman Chitsa and community representatives. However, studies were conducted on the historical origins of the conflict and the livelihoods of the settlers. Chitsa people in the park were not remotely interested in discussing livelihood options outside the park. The idea of establishing public-private-community partnerships was thus deferred. The Task Force's top-down approach to resolving the challenge of human settlements in the park appeared to have reached an impasse. A different strategy was required.

## Traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution

The Task Force's dominant focus on securing alternative land for Chitsa settlers overshadowed the power conflict between Headman Chitsa and Chief Tshovani. It became evident that the GNP-Chitsa conflict could not be resolved until the issue of Chitsa's chieftainship was addressed. This required a different approach that would be significantly informed by local traditions of conflict resolution. This would require *mediation* by a neutral party, a task that the researchers agreed to carry out. The original aim was to consult traditional leaders individually and then hold a brainstorming workshop on the best traditional mechanism to be used to resolve the conflict. During the process of conducting these consultations, it became evident that the idea of a workshop was not culturally appropriate. Significantly, mediation was to be done by one of the chiefs and the late Chief Mahenye in neighbouring Chipinge district, emerged as the leading traditional authority (see Fig. 2). The late Chief Mahenye convened meetings at a tourist lodge in his area at which a mediation strategy was mapped out. He proposed bringing Headman Chitsa and Chief Tshovani to the negotiating table by inviting them to a ceremony celebrating his receipt of a new vehicle from government. The meeting noted that the tensions between Headman Chitsa and Chief Tshovani are a product of the colonial practice of divide and rule which planted discord between ruling dynasties. The meeting also affirmed Headman Chitsa's seniority in the traditional royal hierarchy. The meeting agreed that Headman Chitsa should have his chieftaincy restored and this would help to bring peace between Chitsa and Tshovani and provide a good starting point in building bridges between Chitsa and GNP. At the moment, Chitsa views the establishment of the park as directly contributing to the loss of his chieftaincy and land.

On 18 October 2007, the ceremony marking the handover to Chief Mahenye of a new pick-up truck was held. Among other dignitaries, Headman Chitsa was present but Chief Tshovani was conspicuous by his absence and this signalled his social distance from Chief Mahenye. After the official ceremony, a meeting was held at Chilo Lodge, itself one of the two tourist lodges in Mahenye. The late Chief Mahenye was tasked to gain the support of Chief Sengwe and the Chief Executive Officer of Chiredzi District Council and draft a letter recommending Chitsa's elevation to a full chief. The letter would be signed by these three parties and submitted to the National Chief's Council, secure its support and submit the recommendations to the Ministry of Local Government via the District Administrator. The irony of it is that the President of the National Chief's Council, Chief Charumbira holds the view that for Chitsa to be elevated, he has to secure the endorsement of Chief Tshovani.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately Chief Mahenye passed away in December 2007 and efforts are under way to move the mediation process forwards.

In summary, there has been a gradual shift from a theoretical understanding of the causes of GNP-Chitsa conflict to actual interventions meant to resolve it. However, initial top-down attempts to resolve the conflict overlooked the centrality of the chieftainship dispute. The support given by Bio-Hub has helped to draw this dynastic conflict, and the traditional mechanisms for resolving it, into sharper relief. It remains to be seen whether the installation of Chitsa as Chief will help to resolve the land dispute between him and GNP.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Chief Charumbira at Parliament Building, Harare December 2007.

## Lessons learned

A number of lessons can be drawn from this paper that have significance for scholarly thinking and research on, as well as practical interventions in, parks-people conflicts. These relate to the applied research process; parks, displacement and risks of impoverishment and biodiversity loss; disconnect between the official framing of conflicts and local dynamics; efficacy of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution; and contradictions between agricultural and conservation policies.

### The applied research process

Bio-Hub and the authors approached the idea of finding solutions to the GNP-Chitsa conflict from certain assumptions about ‘good’ governance. Ideas of participation, inclusive democracy and transparency were right upfront in our thinking. We were guided by the ethical principle that our research would, to the extent possible, not be used to cause harm to the Chitsa community resident in the park.

One of the assumptions was that the research would include the participation of primary and secondary stakeholders who would be invited to a workshop to discuss the Chitsa-Tshovani conflict and come up with a preferred institutional mechanism for resolving the conflict. The realities on the ground were different and required adjustments on the researchers’ part. Chieftainship issues are not necessarily matters for public discussion; discussions were confined to royal lineages (see Fig. 2). Furthermore, mediation was to be done by one of the chiefs and not the researchers. In consequence, the authors’ role became one of documenting the process and assisting to take local recommendations to the Chitsa Task Force and the National Chief’s Council. The assumption that mediation involves ‘neutrality’ is problematic. Ascribed ties of kinship and interests appear to heavily influence mediation. In power-laden contexts of chieftainship disputes, kinsmen are not expected to be ‘neutral.’ They are expected to stand up and be counted and to openly show their support. The research required building relationships of trust with stakeholders. This was particularly important because each party wanted to know whether the researchers were on their side or not. Allaying fears of betrayal was an important aspect of building trust. Our research tried to look at both sides to the conflicts in a way that won the trust of the parties concerned.

It is evident that the study of conflict requires the researcher to go beyond surface appearances and uncover underlying factors behind parks-people conflicts such as contradictory policies, population growth, deepening poverty, competition over scarce natural and socio-economic resources and power politics. In the long-term, population growth, and resource scarcity and competition could result in environmental degradation in the park which in turn might exacerbate poverty and inequity (IUCN 2005). A lesson from this is that in agro-ecologically marginal environments that have wildlife, policy actors need to consider wildlife-based land use by resident communities.

### Parks, displacement and risks of impoverishment and biodiversity loss

One of the main lessons learnt in our study is that the manner in which the place of people in parks and nature has been envisaged is itself problematic. For some conservationists, the presence of local people in parks is detestable because for them what really matters is wildlife and wilderness. This view runs counter to the one that emphasizes the immanent presence of people in nature. As Adams and Hutton (2007) have observed, the challenge

facing the conservation movement is to move beyond human exclusion to imagining a conceptual and material place for human beings existing within and not outside nature, including national parks. It might be said that this is already a lived 'reality' given the presence of people in many national parks in Asia, Southern Africa, (e.g. Gonarezhou and Limpopo National Parks), Central Africa and South America. However, these people's residence in parks is highly insecure because the basic philosophical architecture of fortress conservation, as reflected in the universal definition of national parks (IUCN 1994) and national park laws, does not allow for human occupation. Indeed, the literature indicates that displacements from parks are a ubiquitous phenomenon in many countries (Brockington and Igoe 2006) especially in Africa. These evictions often evoke feelings of moral outrage among critics of fortress conservation who argue that evictions are the most violent acts that a sovereign state can do to its citizens (Brockington and Igoe 2006). Evictees face the loss of life, property, sources of livelihood and destitution (Colchester 2002). They lose places of ritual significance and their sense of identity (cf. Ranger 1999; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003a). The Chitsa case, and others, shows that the conservation of wildlife and 'pristine' habitats in national parks is thus often carried out at the expense of displaced and 'host' communities. In displacing people from national parks, governments conveniently ignore the negative impact of such actions on 'host' communities. The Chitsa Task Force's unsuccessful attempt to reduce the land sizes of Chizvirizvi people is an example.

Another lesson arising from this study is that evictions that may appear to be good for biodiversity turn out to be bad for it because evictees have incentives not to acquiesce in wilderness conservation (Pearce 2005). Chitsa people re-occupied the land from which they were forcibly removed during the 1960s. Generally, evictees pose a threat to the biodiversity and habitats that national parks seek to protect. Past experience shows that many states in East and Southern Africa that evicted resident populations do not have the human and financial resources to police porous national park boundaries and this exposes wildlife to illegal off-takes (Hulme and Murphree 2001).

#### Disconnect between the official framing of conflicts and local dynamics

Policy actors and Chitsa people appear to have differentially framed the causes of the conflict. This had important implications for the actions that they took. In other words, the ways they constructed and represented the conflicts led them to suggest solutions that were diametrically opposed. When trying to address the issue of land before tackling that of the chieftaincy, official stakeholders apparently pursued a goal that clashed with that of Headman Chitsa. However, by focusing on the Chitsa-Tshovani dynastic conflict, stakeholders reframed the way they looked at the park-people conflict and took a decision to try and win-over Chitsa rather than antagonizing him and making him and his people sworn enemies of the park and conservation. An important lesson emerging from this is that of adaptive management.

#### Efficacy of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution

This paper has shown that traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution carry the promise of helping to resolve seemingly intractable challenges of disputes between traditional leaders and between local people and the park. However, it may be too early to celebrate the efficacy of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution because the Chitsa-Tshovani chieftainship dispute has not yet been resolved. Nonetheless, a key lesson emerging from

this is that the age-old custom of enabling elders to mediate in conflicts is a step in the right direction. It gives due respect to local cultural traditions of resolving disputes whilst at the same time taking cognizance of the fact that culture is itself a site of power struggles whose resolution involves wider institutions of the nation-state.

### Contradiction between agricultural and wilderness-conservation policies

Another vital lesson arising from this study is that competing national policies can be a source of conflict at the local level. The popularization of the ‘fast track’ land reform programme as a tool for redistributing land provided fertile ground for the occupation of GNP. Chitsa people played up the historical loss of their chieftaincy and land to justify re-settlement in the park which Chief Tshovani opposes. The occupation of the park runs directly counter to parks legislation which seeks to give practical effect to the conceptual separation of ‘pristine’ nature from human society. In a very real sense, the Chitsa case shows that park legitimacy may be legally imposed at the centre but negated by non-compliance at the local level. Among other factors, cross-sectoral policy incoherence at the national level has been a contributory element in the GNP-Chitsa conflict.

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